

SJR21

Senate Joint Resolution Regarding the Galton Study Area / Project ("Project")

Testimony by Ron Olfert

To the Montana House Natural Resource Committee

Mar. 25, 2009

I represent two groups: Montanans for Property Rights and The Sanders Natural Resource Council.

We strongly support SJR21 for the following reasons:

(1) Wilderness Study Areas were never intended to be "in perpetuity". They should be released for multiple use according to Federal law.

(2) The Kootenai National Forest (KNF) management has stated that expansion of wilderness is not the goal of the Galton Project and that there will be no wilderness proposals generated out of the project. However, the evidence is to the contrary when taken at as a whole. This evidence includes:

- (a) proposed closures of roads;
- (b) goal to maintain the "wilderness character" of the area;
- (c) close match of the Galton Project boundary with the Winton Wedemeyer Proposed Wilderness boundary;
- (d) documented private meetings between the KNF and Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) (ref. minutes of Galton Project meetings held by KNF - Jan., 2008 - Dec. 2009), and the fact that MWA is the primary promoter and sponsor of the Winton Wedemeyer Proposed Wilderness.
- (e) statements of MWA, connecting the Galton with the contained Wilderness Study Area, and referring to that area as "defacto wilderness" (ref.: article by John Gatchell, Conservation Director of MWA "*Montana Wilderness Association comments on Kootenai participation process*" published by Red Lodge Clearinghouse at <http://original.rlch.org/commentary/mwacomment.html>)

Please vote yes on this resolution to prevent wilderness designation of the Galton / Ten Lakes study areas.

Thank you

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# Montana Wilderness Association comments on Kootenai public participation process

JOHN SATCHEL, COLLABORATION CHAIRMAN  
<http://original.rich.org/commentary/mwacomment.html>

The Kootenai "starting option" included 163,000 acres of recommended wilderness in three geographic regions. About half of these areas are recommended in the current forest plan (1987):

## **Cabinet Mountains**

Scotchman Peaks (West Cabinets, partially in Idaho & recommended wilderness by Idaho Panhandle NF)

Series of additions to the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness

## **Yaak River Watershed**

NW Peaks

Roderick

**Whitefish-Galton** (bordering British Columbia & Flathead NF)

Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area

Whitefish Divide (Winton Wedemeyer proposed wilderness)

The Kootenai NF has the largest road mileage (8,000 miles) and the least wilderness (one 94,000-acre area) of any national forest in Montana. The Kootenai also features some of Montana's lowest elevations and highest precipitation. The biodiversity is unmatched in Montana, combining lush red cedar & hemlock forest, impenetrable avalanche chutes brimming with wildlife foods and habitat types unrepresented in wilderness. Defacto wilderness and roadless islands between the 8,000 miles of forest system roads serve as vital refugia for grizzly recovery, native mountain goat ranges, moose, wolverine, lynx and the occasional woodland caribou drifting south from Canada.

Comments on the forest plan from Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks urge the Kootenai to revise a much more conservation-oriented forest plan, including site-specific support for each area recommended in the starting option and far more comprehensive additions to the existing Cabinet Mountains Wilderness.

In addition, the map of unimpaired (healthy) watersheds on the Kootenai essentially matches the map of roadless lands.

Conservation-minded northwest Montana residents participated in every public meeting on the forest plan. Some felt that meetings lacked adequate facilitation allowing some participants (usually motorized-use proponents) to dominate meetings while others struggled to be heard (often conservation representatives and loggers).

Nonetheless the case for specific tracts of wilderness on the heavily roaded Kootenai was made, not in isolation, but generally as part of a landscape package—wilderness here, timber there—a willingness to negotiate travel management differences with the aim of a balanced landscape package that achieved conservation goals and met the needs of the community.

Outside the public meetings there were many meetings and direct talks aimed at working out site-specific agreements with representatives for local snowmobile clubs. It was apparent that agreements were entirely possible in the Yaak and Ten Lakes but that the club leaders were being pressured not to complete any agreements.

Some began attacking the collaborative process itself and the Forest Supervisor went to the last round of forest plan meetings giving clear signals that major changes were in the works regardless of whether they were achieved through collaboration. This signal chilled and effectively ended hopeful collaboration and was followed by Supervisor Casteneda's unilateral action. The key feature of his action was to open a series of areas that had been recommended wilderness to snowmobile traffic, expand timber management and eliminate "recommended wilderness" and replace it with a new category, "wild lands."